

House Republican Press Release

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Legislative Update: Midway through the Session



By State Rep. Toni Boucher, R-143rd, Wilton, Norwalk

The 2005 Session of the General Assembly began with an opening address by Governor M. Jodi Rell and then later her budget message. Now, the legislature is winding up its committee work and bringing legislation to the floor of the House and Senate for action before the June 8 adjournment. Some major issues include:

Ethics Reform: Following scandals involving state and municipal officials, new ethics legislation has been introduced. Proposals include measures to ban campaign contributions from lobbyists and their political action committees, prohibiting campaign contributions from state contractors, lowering campaign contribution limits, closing loopholes in “revolving door” and gift statutes and requiring municipalities to adopt an ethics code.

Medical Malpractice Reform: Skyrocketing insurance premiums for doctors continue to drive up the cost of health care and are forcing some specialists to retire or leave Connecticut. In 2004, then Governor Rowland vetoed a proposed reform. A new version is being negotiated.

Stem Cell Research: Proponents want to authorize and fund research to put Connecticut in the forefront of this biotechnology field. However, the use of embryonic stem cells for research purposes remains a complex issue.

Civil Unions: Some legislators want to make Connecticut the first state to act without a court order and allow civil unions for gay and lesbian couples. One side feels this bill does not go far enough; the other feels it goes too far.

Capital Punishment: A number of legislators attempted to repeal the 1995 Connecticut death penalty law. They proposed to commute the sentence of serial killer Michael Ross and other murderers on Death Row to life in prison without the possibility of release. The bill was defeated.

During the next few weeks, the General Assembly will modify the \$31.1 billion, 2005-2007 two-year budget proposed by Governor Rell in early February. The Governor's proposal includes the following provisions:

Education initiatives would provide laptop computers for ninth and tenth grade English classes throughout the state, increase state aid to local education funding by 2 percent (and a 5 percent increase for elementary and secondary education funding in Fiscal Year 06-07), a 38 percent increase in special education funding and expand early childhood education programs. Her budget, if approved, would propose to freeze tuition at state colleges and universities.

Transportation initiatives would invest \$1.3 billion toward the purchase of new rail cars, rail maintenance facilities, buses and upgrades to state highways and roads. Most of these improvements would be paid by user fees. I am working on several proposals to dramatically improve the Norwalk to Danbury rail line that could become a major asset to our area.

Social Service initiatives would allocate more than \$53 million for the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Funding would cover transitional living, group home and apartment funding for young adults and intensive in-home and community based family focused services. In addition, more than \$24 million would be allocated for services provided by the state Department of Mental Retardation (DMR), including taking steps toward reducing the DMR waiting list.

The governor recognizes the state must close a \$1.2 billion budget gap. To that end, her proposal calls for reductions in spending on existing services by \$1.4 billion. She also proposes raising taxes by \$140 million.

I have concerns over the tax increases in this proposal and a Democratic plan to increase the income tax on people making more than \$133,800. I believe the state must reduce spending before considering such measures. We must respect the spending cap that voters approved statewide in 1992.

If you have opinions on these or other state issues, or if I can help resolve a state problem, please contact me at 1-800-842-1423 or toni.boucher@cga.ct.gov. Thank you.

Rep. Boucher serves the 143rd Assembly District of Wilton and Norwalk in the State House of Representatives